

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00
INRE-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 EB-08 AID-05 OPIC-03 SSC-01
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-----110203 251816Z /44

O R 251705Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6815
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL OPORTO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA
USMISSION USNATO
DIA WASH DC
USNMR SHAPE BEL
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USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

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USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT PO
SUBJ: EANES MEETS THE PRESS

SUMMARY:

IN HIS FIRST DOMESTIC PRESS CONFERENCE, AUGUST 24, PRESIDENT
EANES EXPLAINED HIS OWN ROLE IN THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS SINCE
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THE COLLAPSE OF THE PS/CDS ACCORD, REAFFIRMED HIS COMMITMENT
TO PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS,
EMPHASIZED THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF THE POLITICAL
PARTIES, AND SOUGHT TO COUNTER RUMORS OF GROWING
PRESIDENTIALISM. REACTIONS HAVE BEEN GENERALLY POSITIVE.
IN TERMS OF PUBLIC OPINION, EANES APPEARS WELL AHEAD OF
ALL THE PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS (INCLUDING MARIO SOARES)

ON POINTS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT EANES MET WITH THE PRESS AUGUST 24 FOR HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE SINCE ASSUMING THE PRESIDENCY IN 1976. HE HAD ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO DO SO AFTER THE PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF NOBRE DA COSTA'S CABINET, BUT ADVANCED HIS SCHEDULE IN AN ATTEMPT TO COUNTER SOCIALIST CRITICISM.

HIGHLIGHTS:

--THE DESIGNATION OF NOBRE DA COSTA AS PRIME MINISTER AND THE FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT OF INDEPENDENTS WAS A LAST RESORT DESIGNED TO CREATE CONDITIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENTIAL CONFIDENCE AND PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT.

--HAVING BEEN FORCED TO THAT ALTERNATIVE BY THE INABILITY OF THE PARTIES EITHER TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT OR PARTICIPATE IN A THIRD CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, THE PRESIDENCY IS NATURALLY SUBJECT TO CRITICISM AND CHARGES OF UNCONSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESSES.

--THE PRESIDENT'S PRINCIPAL GOALS REMAIN THE PRESERVATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY, A POPULAR UNDERSTANDING THAT POLITICAL PARTIES REMAIN THE CRUCIAL INGREDIENT IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, AND THE CREATION OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL STABILITY SO THAT DEMOCRACY IN PORTUGAL DOES NOT BECOME A PASSING FANCY.

--IF THE THIRD CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM FAILS
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TO PASS IN THE ASSEMBLY, SECOND AND THIRD ATTEMPTS WOULD BE MADE. LATER, EANES SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF RESIGNING AND IMMEDIATELY RESUBMITTING HIS OWN CANDIDACY IN A NEW PRESIDENTIAL RACE TO REAFFIRM OR RELINQUISH HIS 1976 ELECTORAL MANDATE. BUT HE ADDED THAT RESIGNING WAS NOT HIS STYLE OR PREFERENCE, AND PLAINLY IMPLIED THAT HE DOES NOT EXPECT A NEED FOR HIS RESIGNATION TO ARRIVE.

2. REACTIONS:

PS REACTIONS WERE CAUTIOUS. CDS, PDS, AND PCP REACTIONS WERE GENERALLY POSITIVE BUT THE PARTIES CONTINUE TO STAND BACK UNTIL THE CABINET SELECTION PROCESS IS COMPLETED AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM IS PRESENTED TO THE ASSEMBLY. ACCORDING TO THE DAO, THE ARMED FORCES WERE PLEASED WITH THE PRESIDENT'S MASTERY OF THE ISSUES AND HIS COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY. WE NOTE THAT IN RESPONSE TO A PRESS QUESTION BY A LE MONDE CORRESPONDENT ABOUT A POSSIBLE "PINOCHETAZO", EANES SAID HE BELIEVED "THE CONDUCT OF THE MILITARY TO HAVE BEEN INDISPUTABLY BEYOND REPROACH...THE MILITARY HAVE EVERY INTEREST IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY BECAUSE THEY ARE AWARE OF THE HISTORIC FATALISM THAT FORCES THEM TO INTERVENE WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE IS LOST. AND THE MILITARY,

BECAUSE OF THE WAY IN WHICH THEY ARE ORGANIZED, BECAUSE
OF THEIR VIRTUES AND THEIR DEFECTS, ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO RUN
COUNTRIES. AND THEY KNOW THAT THEMSELVES."

--THE SOCIALISTS:

JAIME GAMA NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS HAD POSITIVE
ELEMENTS BUT THAT THERE REMAINED DIFFERENCES OF OPINION
ON WHETHER THE CURRENT SITUATION COULD HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

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SOCIALISTS, GAMA SAID, COULD BE ENCOURAGED BY THE PRESIDENT'S
DEFENSE OF THE GOALS OF THE REVOLUTION BUT THAT A GOVERNMENT
OF INDEPENDENTS IS AN ABERRATION IN THE NATO AND WEST EUROPEAN
CONTEXT. (NOTE: GAMA BELONGS TO THE MODERATE PS WING BUT

WAS ACTING AS OFFICIAL PS SPOKESMAN.)

-THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS:
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AMANDIO DE AZEVEDO SAID EANES'S REMARKS WERE EXTREMELY POSITIVE AND EMPHASIZED THE PRESIDENT'S MODERATE TONE, HIS ABILITY TO HANDLE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS, HIS DEFENSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES, AND ROLE AS MODERATOR IN ATTEMPTS TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY.

--THE CENTER DEMOCRATS:
AMARO DA COSTA EXPRESSED THE PARTY'S SUPPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT'S SEMI-PRESIDENTIAL APPROACH TO THE CURRENT CRISIS AND HIS EMPHASIS ON THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES. ACCORDING TO DA COSTA, THE PRESIDENT'S INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF A THIRD CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TRANSITORY NATURE OF THE GOVERNMENT IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE CDS.

--THE COMMUNIST PARTY:
THE PCP DESCRIBED THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE AS A MUCH NEEDED CLARIFICATION OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND A USEFUL CONTRIBUTION TOWARD RESOLVING THE CURRENT CRISIS. THE PCP WAS ENCOURAGED BY EANES'S REAFFIRMED DEDICATION TO THE CONSTITUTION, PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY, AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE CURRENT CRISIS WITHIN THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES.

3. COMMENT:
EANES HAD MORE COMMAND OF THE ISSUES THAN IN (RARE) PAST APPEARANCES. HE APPEARS TO HAVE PROJECTED THE RIGHT IMAGE. HE HAS ALSO GIVEN THE PEOPLE A REASSURING SENSE THAT SOMEONE IS STILL AT THE REINS. ACCORDING TO THE PRESIDENT'S STAFF, EANES HAD HOPED TO DELAY HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESS UNTIL AFTER NOBRE DA COSTA'S CABINET WAS COMPLETED. EANES MAY WELL HAVE DECIDED TO GO AHEAD EARLY IN AN ATTEMPT TO
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REAFFIRM HIS OWN DEDICATION TO DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN THE FACE OF SOCIALIST CHARGES OF CREEPING PRESIDENTIALISM. EANES'S "ABOVE THE FRAY" IMAGE LEAVES HIM WELL AHEAD OF ALL THE PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS (INCLUDING MARIO SOARES) ON POINTS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, PRESS CONFERENCES, CHIEF OF STATE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LISBON06324
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780348-1147
Format: TEL
From: LISBON USEEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780824/aaaaatri.tel
Line Count: 224
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5532105c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1622669
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EANES MEETS THE PRESS SUMMARY: IN HIS FIRST DOMESTIC PRESS CONFERENCE, AUGUST 24
TAGS: PINT, PO, (EANES, ANTONIO DOS SANTOS RAMALHO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5532105c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014